

AG investigates a possible organ mix-up in baby's autopsy

Continued from Page A1

Norfolk County District Attorney William R. Keating raised suspicions that a mistake may have been made with chief medical examiner Richard Evans and his superiors at the state Executive Office of Public Safety. After a series of meetings this month, Attorney General Thomas F. Reilly's office launched a criminal inquiry into

the 2002 autopsy.

In a statement yesterday, Reilly said his office is "conducting a comprehensive criminal investigation" into the circumstances surrounding the autopsy and the medical examiner's handling of the 2002 death. Reilly spokeswoman Ann E. Donlan said yesterday the inquiry "at this point" is limited to the 2002 autopsy. She declined to say what criminal

charges might result.

Donlan said all of the state's district attorneys were notified of the probe. District attorneys rely on medical examiners for investigations into suspicious deaths and as key witnesses at homicide trials.

Public Safety Secretary Edward A. Flynn, who oversees the medical examiner's office, promised to cooperate and "take appropriate

action depending on the result of the investigation." He declined to comment further.

Norfolk County investigators who were reviewing the infant's death were trying to determine whether he had died from SIDS — sudden infant death syndrome — or shaken baby syndrome.

A spokesman for Keating's office declined to identify the infant or his parents, or provide further

details.

According to a state employee involved in the investigation, the baby died last fall, and a preliminary autopsy conducted by Dr. Alexander M. Chirkov of the medical examiner's office found evidence of a subdural hematoma — bleeding inside the brain.

Chirkov's autopsy report indicated he checked the eyes for evidence of trauma, but did not spe-

cifically say he had removed them to send them out for a more intensive examination. Chirkov's supervisor, Evans, viewed the hematoma as evidence of child abuse, the state employee said, and Evans ordered further tests on the brain and an examination of the eyeballs by an outside specialist, the state official said.

A set of eyeballs was sent out and tested, and the results showed no indication of trauma. However, Chirkov's autopsy records indicated that he did not remove the eyeballs from the infant's body, raising suspicions that the eyeballs that had been tested were from another cadaver.

At the medical examiner's office, organs, including eyes, are kept in jars of formaldehyde and refrigerated pending the completion of autopsies, which can stretch over many months.

Speaking generally, Dr. Robert M. Reece, clinical professor of pediatrics at Tufts University Medical School and an instructor for

ing suspicious that the eyeballs that had been tested were from another cadaver.

At the medical examiner's office, organs, including eyes, are kept in jars of formaldehyde and refrigerated pending the completion of autopsies, which can stretch over many months.

Speaking generally, Dr. Robert M. Reece, clinical professor of pediatrics at Tufts University Medical School and an instructor for

Officials examining the infant's death were trying to determine whether he died from sudden infant death syndrome or shaken baby syndrome.

the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, said examination of the eyes can be a pivotal test for child abuse.

Reece said a child who died of SIDS would have shown no signs of any medical problem or trauma during an autopsy. But a victim of shaken baby syndrome would have had clear physical evidence of the violence suffered by the child. One key indicator is found in the eyes, Reece said.

In about 80 percent of shaken baby syndrome cases, eye specialists, using a special technique, find "flame-shaped hematomas" in the retina of the child's eyes, he said.

Reece cautioned that autopsy results are just one "piece of the puzzle" investigators must scrutinize before deciding whether a child died from shaken baby syndrome. They must also examine the child's medical history, medical reports if the child was brought to a hospital, and the family background.

The state medical examiner's office has struggled for years with a tight budget and internal problems, but the Romney administration and lawmakers this year have increased the budget to \$3.6 million, from \$2 million, and also called for a study creating a new Department of Forensic Sciences, according to legislative records.

John Ellement can be reached at ellement@globe.com. Sean P.

Officials examining the infant's death were trying to determine whether he died from sudden infant death syndrome or shaken baby syndrome.

the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, said examination of the eyes can be a pivotal test for child abuse.

Reece said a child who died of SIDS would have shown no signs of any medical problem or trauma during an autopsy. But a victim of shaken baby syndrome would have had clear physical evidence of the violence suffered by the child. One key indicator is found in the eyes, Reece said.

In about 80 percent of shaken baby syndrome cases, eye specialists, using a special technique, find "flame-shaped hematomas" in the retina of the child's eyes, he said.

Reece cautioned that autopsy results are just one "piece of the

006017